



Foundations

A Newsletter from Homes For Our Troops | www.hfotusa.org | September 2020

Arriving Safely at Home!



YOUR SUPPORT ENABLES VETERANS TO REBUILD THEIR LIVES

Dear Friends,

It has been humbling to witness donors like you uphold their dedication to our mission of Building Homes and Rebuilding Lives, even during the ongoing pandemic these past few months. Like the patriotism that rose from the ashes of the September 11th terrorist attacks, Americans are rising up and continuing to serve and give back. This type of enthusiasm shined during our Second Annual Day of Giving on July 13, 2020, where we surpassed our \$300,000 goal, including a \$150,000 match from the National Board of Directors and Ambassadors. You truly understand the importance of providing specially adapted custom homes for our nation's severely injured post-9/11 Veterans, especially during times like these.

As you may know, September 11 is now recognized as a National Day of Service and Remembrance, a day where Americans across the country volunteer in their local communities in tribute to the lives lost during the September 11 attacks, and the many who have risen in service to defend our freedom. This year we are hosting the Volunteer Day for Army Sergeant Nathan Shumaker, our 300th home recipient, to align with this day of charitable service. We will be presenting SGT Shumaker and his family with the keys to their home in Hillsboro, Missouri, the following day on Sept. 12, 2020. Your support and generosity have enabled us to reach this momentous occasion and will help us build more homes for many more years to come.

In this issue, we highlight some of our Veterans who continue to serve others and how the freedom of a specially adapted custom home enables them to do so. We also feature some of our Corporate Partners and fundraisers who are going above and beyond in their commitment to our mission by supporting us through volunteering and spreading awareness, in addition to cash donations. This enthusiasm keeps our organization humming.

Thank you again for your dedication to our mission of Building Homes and Rebuilding Lives. I hope you continue to stay safe and healthy as our Veterans are able to do in their HFOT homes.

Sincerely,



H.T. Landwermeyer, Jr.
Brigadier General, USA Retired
President & CEO



September 2020

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Above: SGT David Guzman and his family cut the ribbon to their new home in Wimberley, Texas, on July 18, 2020.



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A History of Excellence

HFOT has been evaluated as one of America's Top Rated Veterans and Military Charities.



Rising to the Top

HFOT home recipient Marine Corporal Kevin Blanchard shares his experience climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro with Chris Long Foundation's Waterboy's Team and raising money for clean water in Tanzania in February 2020.

I have been in my HFOT home for roughly three years now. Over the last few years, I got married, had our beautiful son, Beau, and have been able to overcome many of the physical and emotional barriers due to my time in service. Last year, I was selected to join the Chris Long Foundation's Waterboy's team. The team is made up of 12 people that get selected each year from across the country, including military Veterans, current and former NFL players, and clean water advocates. The purpose of Waterboys is to raise money through fundraising to dig clean water wells in Tanzania, Africa. In addition to our fundraising efforts, we climbed Mount Kilimanjaro to represent the many miles that Tanzanian women have to travel every day to collect clean water for their families and community.

I engaged local businesses and organized fundraisers to raise over \$23,000. That is enough to fund half of one well site that would supply 7,500 people clean water for 10 years. Collectively, as a team we raised over \$200,000. After arriving in Tanzania, we were able to visit with the tribal communities and schools that would be impacted by our efforts. We got to see firsthand the struggle of not having clean water. I was overwhelmed by the welcome we received. We joined in on ceremonial dances, kicked a soccer ball with the children, and listened to elders tell stories of their hunting and gathering communities.

The entire experience was life-changing, especially reaching the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro. I tried to leave everything negative from my past on top of that mountain. It was like I dumped out the things I didn't need in my life and kept the things I did need. I wanted to use the experience of summiting as a way to build a better me for my family and my future. Reaching the summit gave me the courage to dig deep, to grow and let go of anything in my past that was holding me back.

Climbing Mount Kilimanjaro and helping those in need gave me so much satisfaction, and helped me become a stronger person, but it's organizations like Homes For Our Troops that provided me the support to make this happen. Our mortgage-free HFOT home has given me the opportunity to not only rebuild my life after injury, but enabled me to go above and beyond and build a better life than I had before I was injured. Our home has helped me give back to my community, and to organizations like the Chris Long Foundation. And lastly, our home is a safe and fully accessible place to recover after physically demanding adventures such as climbing mountains. My wheelchair got a lot of use once I returned back home to my family. But I am happy to announce that I have fully recovered from the climb, and have returned home to my wonderful wife, Myra, our sweet baby boy, Beau, and our 190lb American Mastiff named Socrates.

I would like all the HFOT donors and supporters to know that their support really does change lives. We are grateful every day for what you have done to make that change happen.

Thank you Homes For Our Troops, donors, and supporters. We love you.



Earlier this year Marine Corporal Kevin Blanchard traveled to Tanzania, Africa, to help dig clean water wells.

A Continued Call to Duty



Army Sergeant First Class Gabriel Monreal continued to serve his fellow Veterans as a fire arms instructor at the Center for the Intrepid, and currently contributes to other charitable organizations.

When Army Sergeant First Class Gabriel Monreal lost his left leg while serving in Afghanistan in 2010, he initially felt like everything he had worked for throughout his military career was gone. Days earlier, Gabriel was leading his platoon on missions in Afghanistan, and now he needed help with simple tasks like using the bathroom. "There was no light at the end of the tunnel. I ceased to exist as an Infantryman... I was no longer a Sergeant First Class with the 101st Screaming Eagles," he says. "I felt sad, angry, depressed, worthless, and empty."

Gabriel retreated to a dark place emotionally and turned to substance abuse to cope. He soon realized the impact it was having on his wife, Rachel, and their children. "They didn't want an Infantryman as a dad or husband; they just want me as a dad and husband," he says.

As a Senior Non-commissioned officer (NCO) and a leader, Gabriel is conditioned to provide his comrades with purpose, direction, and motivation. He found a way to continue his calling by leading Soldiers as a firearms instructor at the Center for the Intrepid (CFI), teaching active duty and retired service members how to move and shoot again with their prosthetics and injuries. "I wanted to let these new wounded guys and girls know that it's all going to be OK, that nothing in the world changed. We are the ones that changed, and we just have to figure it out," he says.

Gabriel would watch his students come in as patients using wheelchairs and took pride in seeing them leave a couple of months later with a new sense of confidence walking on prosthetics. "It made me feel good to see them realize that even though they were wounded and missing body parts, they were still Soldiers and Marines."

Gabriel is continuously finding ways to serve his country and community. He and his family are involved with Operation Comfort, a local nonprofit in San Antonio that offers cycling/hand-cycling, woodworking, mechanical engineering, and sled hockey programs to Veterans treated at CFI. Through the program, he has gone on bike rides in France and Vietnam to honor fallen Veterans by laying wreaths at ceremonies and memorials along the route. The group also raises money to send Vietnam Veterans back to Vietnam with all expenses paid. "So many people helped me along the way, and I feel in my heart that I need to try to help others as much as I can," he says. "On 27 OCT 1997, I swore in, and I never swore out. I try my best to this day to live by the NCO creed."

Gabriel is currently working long hours to help send his four children to college. Gabriel will not have to overwork himself when he receives the financial stability of a donated home. "Having the opportunity to live mortgage-free is unfathomable to us right now. This home will alleviate so much of the financial strain we all face," he says.

Gabriel's family cannot wait to see him living comfortably. Rachel says it's hard to watch her husband maneuver through the home when he uses his wheelchair. "The kids and I are excited to be able to see Gabe finally comfortable," says Rachel. "Living in a barrier-free environment will give me peace of mind knowing Gabe feels secure in a space where he can just relax."

Bringing Back the Beat

Army Specialist Steven Baskis always loved music. As a child, his father would take Steven's hands while sitting in his lap and tap them to the beat as they listened to songs by classic artists like The Beach Boys and AC/DC. In his teenage years, Steven played guitar and the drums in garage bands and dabbled in audio recording. "I really took to the drums, I love the beat," he says.

After high school, he started drifting away from music when he enlisted, and his military career took center stage. He became focused on attaining his goal of becoming a special forces medical sergeant. In May 2008, Steven lost his eye sight when an explosively formed penetrator (EFP) detonated next to his vehicle in Iraq, bringing his military career path to a halt.

Immediately following his injury, Steven's recovery became his priority. But as determined as he was to be independent again, he found it discouraging that he could not live alone and had to move often. When Steven received his specially adapted custom Homes For Our Troops home in Montrose, Colorado, in 2018, he finally had a place where he could live on his own. Adaptations tailored to his injuries, such as zero threshold doorways and phone-activated temperature controls, enable Steven to safely navigate his home.

Having a barrier-free environment gives Steven the ability to focus on his interests and career aspirations. He has become reacquainted with his love of music and turned his home into an audio recording studio for music and podcasts. He is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in music production via online courses with Berklee College of Music in Boston.

Steven says music has been an essential part of his recovery, and he'll often listen to tunes as he climbs mountains and does other outdoor activities. "Audio is more or less everything. Now that I'm blind, it's become an obsession."

Steven wants to use his skills to support others once he completes his degree. He envisions recording and holding virtual concerts for up and coming artists in his studio, and helping folks promote their charitable causes on his podcast. "The podcast is me trying to help others share what they want to say."

Steven says his HFOT home is why he can pursue his love of music and make it a career where he can support others. He is especially grateful to have the financial security of living in a donated home during challenging times like these. "I can't see the home, but I can feel it – it's an amazing space for me," he says. "This home, and the people who donated to make it happen, helped me create a foundation and move forward."



SPC Steven Baskis received the keys to his specially adapted custom home in September 2018.



SPC Steven Baskis has turned his HFOT home into a recording studio for music and podcasts.

Finally, at home

Anthony Guzman, Army Sergeant David Guzman's 17-year-old son, was overcome with appreciation for HFOT donors and supporters during his father's Key Ceremony on July 18, 2020. To the right is the speech he gave during the event.



Wow, okay so, first off, I would like to say thank you to Homes For Our Troops and everyone who helped out. From Community Outreach Coordinator Shaquanta "Q" Bailey to Executive Director Bill Ivey, to those who built this home, to literally everyone. I'm so grateful, and thankful, for this to be happening to us.

Homes For Our Troops is a blessing, and for them to be doing all of this, is just unbelievable. It breaks my heart seeing injured Veterans not receive the support they deserve because they do so much for all of us. Making adapted homes for Veterans and their families means so much to me. Seeing my dad struggle throughout the years due to his injury hurts me since I know he feels trapped in his own home. And a Veteran shouldn't feel trapped in a country where they served for us to be free. Homes For Our Troops will make my dad feel like he's actually home, so thank you so much to everyone who made this possible.

Carrying on the Commitment to Serve

This June, Homes For Our Troops was humbled and honored to receive a fourth grant from the 1LT Rob Seidel Wounded Soldiers Fund, a donor-advised fund of the Adams County Community Foundation in Gettysburg, Penn., created by Bob and Sandy Seidel. The fund honors their son's memory, 1LT Rob Seidel, who graduated from West Point in 2004 and served as a platoon leader with the 10th Mountain Division in Iraq. In 2006, he and four other Soldiers lost their lives when their vehicle was struck by an improvised explosive device (IED). As a platoon leader, Rob felt a tremendous responsibility for his men's safety and well-being, putting their concerns above himself.

The 1LT Rob Seidel Wounded Soldiers Fund continues Rob's commitment to his fellow Soldiers, supporting charities that provide direct services to military Veterans of the War on Terrorism. Such support includes medical treatment, housing assistance, psychological, physical, occupational, recreational, music and art therapies, companionship, mentoring, employment training, and other services that help War on Terrorism Veterans lead full and productive lives. Sandy says, "It is what Robbie would have wanted," adding that they chose to recommend a grant to HFOT from their donor-advised fund because the mission "gives independence to Veterans who returned with life-changing physical and psychological injuries."

Through the fund, the Seidel Family and the Adams County Community Foundation have supported four HFOT homes in the greater Gettysburg area, bringing security and peace of mind to the Veterans and their families. On behalf of the entire HFOT family, we thank the Seidels for entrusting us to honor Rob's memory.



Lieutenant Rob Seidel

Nationwide, donor-advised funds and community foundations help HFOT carry out our mission through their commitment to their community and their Veterans. To learn more about how you can support HFOT through your donor-advised fund or connect HFOT to a community foundation near you, please contact Mae Socha, Grant Manager at **508-967-9725** or msocha@hfotusa.org

Fundraising Forward!

Taking care of Veterans is our duty as Americans, and Homes For Our Troops is grateful for everyone who has joined us over the years. We are thankful to those who have stepped up to Pay It Forward with their time and efforts by raising money and awareness to advance our mission of Building Homes and Rebuilding Lives.

Susan Sullivan

It all started in 2013 at the Army 10 Miler for Susan Sullivan to become an avid Team HFOT runner. Since then, she has participated in numerous races including her first Do It Yourself (DIY) Race, running the BAA Half Marathon in 2019, while continuing to raise money and awareness for HFOT's mission. "This organization has totally changed my life – HFOT is supportive, understanding, extremely helpful and amazing with what they do for severely injured Veterans."



Susan Sullivan with Cpl Carlos Garcia in 2016.



Jacquie Brink's Game of Thrones birthday party in January 2020.

Jacquie Brink

Jacquie Brink first heard about HFOT through a client and was intrigued because her client's son-in-law, Brad Lang, was a HFOT home recipient in North Carolina. She has spearheaded two golf tournaments for HFOT home recipients, participated in a Volunteer Day, and most recently raised money for our mission by holding a Game of Thrones 50th birthday party for her husband, Scott. She continues to find new, fun ways to support HFOT, and she is already looking ahead for 2021.

Cavalry Classic

The Cavalry Classic is a semi-annual golf tournament hosted and organized by employees of Northrop Grumman in Melbourne, FL. Not only has this group of dedicated supporters raised money for HFOT, they have attended and volunteered at several build events, which has led them to become even more motivated and committed to our mission. "We have felt like a part of the HFOT family since our first communications with the organization. The HFOT staff has been very supportive and involved with the Cavalry Classic, and we are able to feel the personal impact and contributions we are making on the lives of others."

- Chris Jagers, a Cavalry Classic event organizer



Cavalry Classic in October 2019.



Sam Hudson in May 2020.

Private First Class Sam Hudson

This past Memorial Day weekend, US Army Reserve, Private First Class, Sam Hudson completed a 22-mile hike, carrying a 50lb rucksack, to raise awareness for HFOT. Sam had support from his family, friends, community, and the Epicurean Garage Restaurant that dedicated the entire week to help him raise money for Homes For Our Troops. "HFOT is a wonderful organization, doing wonderful things for the brave men and women who served our country."

- PFC Sam Hudson

Heather Sweesy

"HFOT provides such a powerful and meaningful impact to the families, it drives me to share what they do with everyone I know," says Heather Sweesy. She attributes joining the HFOT family to her late husband, Dave. Being a Veteran of Desert Storm himself, Dave wanted to give back and help his fellow Veterans. The two were impressed that nearly 90 cents of every dollar spent goes directly to HFOT's mission. From a wine tasting at their home, to several other events including a Memorial Day fundraiser at Coach Brewery, the Dave Van Doren Memorial Fund, and most recently, Heather's Birthday Facebook fundraiser, she is constantly raising money for HFOT's mission while contributing to her husband's legacy of honoring our Nation's Heroes.



Heather and Dave Sweesy with Navy PO3 Justin Hendrickson and his wife Jennie.

There are ways you can also Pay It Forward by joining our HFOT family and hosting a fundraiser. If you would like to become involved in advancing our mission, please contact us at ifundraising@hfotusa.org

Welcome Plump Engineering!



We are proud to welcome Plump Engineering Inc. as Homes For Our Troops' newest corporate partner. Plump Engineering, Inc. is crucial to creating our home plans, thus enabling HFOT to continue providing high quality homes for our Veterans. Please join us in thanking them for their support in our critical mission of Building Homes and Rebuilding Lives.

"We at Plump Engineering, Inc. are extremely proud and honored to be partnering with Homes For Our Troops. Knowing that our team is contributing to these projects, which enable severely injured Veterans to live in a specially adapted custom home with their families, is such a satisfying way to give back to these men and women who put their lives at risk for our country," says President of Plump Engineering Richard Plump. "It is extremely meaningful because these projects are so personal, specific to each Veteran and his/her family. Knowing that our team is contributing to a better, easier way of living for these Veterans and their families is very rewarding for me personally and everyone here at PEI. Thank you for your service and allowing Americans to be safe and free."

Corporate Partners Paying it Forward

Our corporate partners play a significant role in carrying out our mission. They not only contribute 35% of our annual revenue, but they also help raise awareness about HFOT with their employees and customers, as well as attend and volunteer at HFOT Build Events.

Veterans United's Branch Manager Brannon Knox, has been a staple at HFOT build events for years. He is a Retired Naval Master Chief who became involved with HFOT while living in California; he now brings the same enthusiasm in Texas where he currently resides. You can often catch him laying sod or speaking on behalf of our relationship with Veterans United, a National Partner of HFOT since 2012. His first build event was Marine Corporal Carlos Torres' Groundbreaking in 2013. "I thought I did some really special things and was able to influence many folks while serving our country; however, I realized there was so much work I needed to do while attending the ceremony," he says. "I committed to doing everything I could to ensure the recipients were welcomed in their new communities, and that these communities were aware they were receiving an American Hero as their newest addition."

Many of our partners also host events to raise funds and awareness for our mission. Following the lead of their CEO, Kent Taylor, Texas Roadhouse has been supporting HFOT since our founding in 2004. If you have attended one of our build events, you have likely been served lunch by the Roadhouse "Roadies." As a National Partner, the restaurant chain has taken every opportunity to involve its team members in our mission by volunteering to support HFOT Staff, by providing lunch for event attendees, or assisting with event logistics.

Texas Roadhouse is known for going above and beyond to support HFOT Veterans. For the past 16 years, restaurant locations have hosted annual motorcycle runs to benefit HFOT, which draw hundreds of riders. The restaurants work with local Patriot Guard Riders and Veteran Motorcycle clubs to orchestrate a fun and safe ride. Motorcyclists enjoy a delicious meal served by the friendly Texas Roadhouse staff when they return from the trip. These events not only engage the community; they also generate significant awareness for Homes For Our Troops. This summer, the rides have shifted to being virtual due to COVID-19, but are still raising money and awareness.



Veterans United's Brannon Knox with Army SGT LisaMarie Wiley at SGT Wiley's Key Ceremony last year.



Company CEO Taylor increased his personal support by joining the HFOT Board of Directors in 2017, providing his strategic guidance and oversight to assist HFOT in its critical mission.

Learn more about partnership opportunities at www.hfotusa.org/partner

Thank you to all of our Corporate Partners!

